

Introduction to

*THE POETICAL WORKS OF  
SAMUEL WOODWORTH*

Edited by his Son. [Frederick A. Woodworth]

In Two Volumes

Vol. I

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Introductory Notice  
of Samuel Woodworth,  
Prepared from Various Sources,  
By George P. Morris.

Samuel Woodworth was born at Scituate, Plymouth county, in the state of Massachusetts, on the thirteenth of January 1785. He was the youngest of four children. His father was a soldier of the Revolution.

At the age of fourteen, young Woodworth produced several effusions in verse, in which his schoolmates and the clergyman of the parish thought they discovered traits of genius deserving encouragement and cultivation. He was accordingly, with the approbation of his parents, placed under the care of the Rev. Nehemiah Thomas. In the family of this excellent man, Master Woodworth remained one year; during which time he was taught the English and Latin grammars, and made great proficiency in the study of the classics. Soon afterward he found it necessary to make choice of some occupation by which he might procure a livelihood. He chose the profession of a printer; and, after bidding adieu to his native town, proceeded to Boston, where he bound himself an apprentice to Benjamin Russell, editor and proprietor of the "Columbia Centinel," with whom he continued until the term of his apprenticeship expired, in 1806. During his period he employed his leisure-hours in writing poetry for the different periodical publications then issued in that city, under the signature of SELIM. He continued to use this nom de plume for most of his writings in after-life, and was often called by this name among his intimate friends.

In 1807, he published a weekly sheet at New Haven, entitled the "Belles-Lettres Repository," and wrote a long poem from which we have made several selections in the present volume. The following year he passed in Baltimore during which time he contributed many of his best poems to the newspapers of that city. In the spring of 1809

he proceeded to New York, where, in 1810 he married an amiable young lady, by whom he had a large family of children.

During the contest between the United States and Great Britain, in 1812-1814, Mr. Woodworth conducted a weekly newspaper in New York, entitled "The War," in which he chronicled our victories by land and sea. He also, at that period, supplied with his ever-ready pen, poetical tributes to American valor and patriotism, which still live in the memory of many whom they then delighted. He edited at the same time a monthly magazine, called the "Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository" devoted to the promulgation of the doctrines of the New Church (Swedenborgian), of which he was a sincere professor, and for some time a licentiate, in the city of New York.

In 1816, he wrote the "Champion of Freedom," a novel in two volumes; and at a later date, a series of papers in prose, entitled, "The Confessions of a Sensitive Man." he subsequently conducted "The Casket," "The Parthenon," and "The Literary Gazette." He was associated with the friend who prepares this brief sketch of him in the establishment of the "New York Mirror," during the first year of its publication, which was commenced on the second of August, 1823; and ever afterward he remained a frequent contributor to its columns. At this period of his life, he wrote much for the stage; and is domestic opera of the "Forest Rose" still retains its popularity.

His poetical correspondence was curious and unique; that wit Zorayda is about as fair a specimen of the whole, as the single brick of antiquity was of the quality of the building it represented.

#### TO SELIM.

Enchanting minstrel! to whose lay  
My pulses would responsive play,  
Till reason yields her gentle sway  
To fascination's power;  
I grieve that fate should be so hard,  
That fortune shuns a modest bard,  
Who vainly asks of Fame reward --  
A laurel or a flower.

You wake your magic lyre in vain,  
And fruitless bid its chords complain;  
All listen, all admire the strain,  
And wonder whence it flows;  
But were the world informed with truth,  
Patrons would never raise the youth;  
Envy would show his venom'd tooth,  
And scorn increase his woes.

Such is a modern poet's fate,  
Unless his sphere is with the great,  
When gold will give his genius weight,  
And purchase smiles of Fame.

But ah! a bard with soul of fire,  
Tho' blest with Pope's or Milton's lyre,  
If humbly born, must scarce aspire  
To lisp her envied name.

Then, Selim, throw thy lyre away,  
Nor deign to waste its dulcet lay  
On souls who cannot, while you play,  
Appreciate the strain;  
Whose prejudice forbids to know  
The sweets which in your numbers flow --  
Inspiring joy, relieving wo[e],  
And lessening every pain.

#### TO ZORAYDA.

Does Selim wake his lyre in vain,  
And fruitless breathe the pensive strain,  
Because his brows no laurels gain,  
And he obscurely sings?  
As well might fair Zorayda say,  
The sylvan fountains vainly play,  
When forests hide their darkened way,  
And rocks conceal their springs.

But lovely minstrel, learn to know  
Their streamlets kiss the meads below,  
Who drink unconscious whence they flow,  
And thence derives their smile;  
So may his song perhaps impart  
A glow of transports to the heart,  
Bid rapture smile or grief depart,  
And he unknown the while.

Do Selim's numbers flow in vain,  
Because, as hundreds more complain,  
Fortune ne'er will reward the strain,  
Nor gild his vocal reed?  
Then, where Canary blooms in spring,  
Her golden tenants vainly sing,  
If hunger urge to spread the wing,  
Or stoop to peck the seed.

But know, where'er the songster rove,  
The strain he warbles through the grove,

Delights himself, or charms his love,  
Whose charms the strain inspire:  
So I the lingering our beguile,  
Lean o'er my harp, entranced the while,  
And gain, from her I love, a smile,  
Whose beauty tunes my lyre.

No, Selim does not sing in vain,  
If fair Zorayda hear the strain,  
And in her matchless numbers deign  
To plead the poet's cause;  
For others Fate may trophies pile,  
Serener joys are his the while;  
He asks no fortune but her smile,  
No fame but her applause.

#### TO SELIM.

Go on, contented youth! Zorayda cri'd--  
Resume your lyre and charm the Paphian grove,  
Nor beg the boon, but claim your just reward,  
The admiration of the sex you love.

But if the happy fair who tunes your lyre  
reciprocates the flame her Selim sings,  
Let love not always whisper from the wire,  
But loftier numbers animate the strings.

Your country's glory claims exalted praise,  
In years an infant, but matured in fame;  
Heroes are hers who acts deserve your lays,  
Then gild your rising song with FREEDOM'S name.

When foreign despots dare usurp the deep,  
And add new wrongs to insults unredressed,  
With bolder hand the chord indignant sweep,  
And vengeance wake in every freeman's breast.

And should our injuries at length demand  
BELLONA'S banner once again unfurled,  
Then let the strain, which fires the patriot band,  
Swell like our thunders, which shall sake the world.

The sword of vengeance will not gleam in vain,  
Nor vainly burst our cataracts of fire;

FREEDOM shall ride triumphant o'er the main,  
And Europe's pirates in dismay retire.

The dove of peace shall soon regain her nest,  
And JOVE'S blest bird the olive branch display;  
Then be the change in softer notes expressed,  
And LOVE again we warbled in your lay.

Soft as the zephyrs when then fan the lake,  
And dimpling smiles betray the ravished kiss,  
In sweeter tones your numbers then may wake,  
And every note breathe friendship, love, and peace.

So I have seen the bolt of vengeance hurled,  
While, clothed in tempests, angry nature frowned;  
anon her smiles were scattered o'er the world,  
And sweeter wreaths her glowing temples bound.

By gems of silver glittered from the spray,  
And deeper tints in every blossom glowed;  
The woodland songsters caught a livelier lay,  
And melody in richer streamlets flowed.

#### TO ZORAYDA.

Ah! why sweet minstrel! why bid Selim soar  
Beyond the limits of his humble sphere?  
Why bid him ape the thunders awful roar,  
And swell the train in maddening WAR'S career?

Forbear, dear girl! to urge the strange request--  
He cannot rouse his milky heart to rage;  
Then let him lull the timorous bird to rest,  
Or feel in dance with pleasure in its cage.

His gentle muse on Hellconia strays,  
Or gayly sports in sweet Pierian bowers;  
And when descending to inspire his lays,  
Her aery form is but the breadth of flowers.

MINERVA'S helm her brow could ne'er sustain,  
The sword of MARS her arm could never wield--  
He cannot woo her to a task so vain--  
She flies with terror the embattled field.

He once essayed, but like the Mantuan swain,  
APOLLO checked his vain presumptuous pride--  
Forbade him to attempt the daring strain,  
Nor paint the scene where brave MONTGOMERY died.

He blushed, obeyed, nor more mistakes his powers;  
One wish alone his ardent soul employs--  
In Beauty's smile to bask life's summer hours,  
To feast on love and banquet on its joys.

Life is a chase, the game terrestrial bliss;  
If shadows please, why not a shade pursue?  
He tastes it in affections nectared kiss;  
His song affords it -- if approved by you.

There is a magic harp whose dulcet tones  
AEOLUS only has the skill to wake;  
Which breathes to night its sweetly-singing moans,  
If no rude blasts the soft enchantment break.

He came with fragrance on lucid wings,  
Paused as he passed, enraptured at the sight;  
Then fondly stooped and kissed the silken strings,  
Which broke in ecstasy and breathed delight.

The playful god in transport bore away  
The ravished sweets his lawless kisses stole;  
And distance heard the breezy notes decay,  
In sighs whose softness harmonized the soul.

But BOREAS came with rude disastrous breath,  
And swept the tender strings with direful force,  
Harsh DISCORD waked, and, like the bird of death,  
Shrieked to the gale in accents loud and hoarse.

Such is the lyre which Selm, when a child,  
Received with rapture from the pensive muse;  
Its whispers please him though untaught and wild;  
But loftier tones the trembling chords refuse.

O! then permit him still he gentler strain,  
In all its tender languishments, to wake;  
For if he rudely sweep the strings again,  
He fears, Zorayda, that his lyre will break.

TO SELIM.

Has Selim the soul which his numbers portray,  
And is it expressed in the glance of his eye?  
Then would I forever exist in the ray,  
While mine to his harp should respond with a sigh.

If his heart truly throb to the notes of his lyre,  
And is in his accents as sweetly expressed,  
His voice music be music -- must rapture inspire;  
To quaff the rich melody is to be blest.

If his feelings are justly portrayed by his muse,  
And are in his visage correctly displayed,  
What fair but with rapture that visage reviews,  
Reflections fair model, by beauty arrayed?

In short, if his mind is expressed in his lays,  
So melting in sorrow, in rapture so warm,  
And form correspond, it were rashness to gaze --  
The heart unresisting must yield to the charm.

But ah! If hypocrisy warble the strain,  
And the soul have no part in its magical sweets,  
O! tell me, and then ape Apollo in vain,  
But never emerge from thy secret retreats.

The whole career of Samuel Woodworth was full of interest. He has been eulogized by Clinton Webster, Channing, Everett, Halleck,\* Pinkney, Irving, Paulding, Griswold, Duyckinck, Story, Sir Walter Scott and other eminent scholars and gentleman. Several of his poems were

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[Footnote.]

\* Fitz-Greene Halleck rendered a graceful tribute to Woodworth in these beautiful lines, "To the Poet's Daughter, written in the Album of Miss Harriet Woodworth."

"A lady asks the Minstrel's rhyme.  
A lady asks? There was a time  
When, musical as a play-bell's chime  
To wearied boy,  
That sound would summon dream sublime,  
Of pride and joy.

"But now the spell hath lost its sway,  
Life's first born fancies first decay,  
Gone are the plumes and pennons gay

Of young Romance;  
There linger but her ruins gray,  
And broken lance.

"Tis a new world -- no more to maid,  
Warrior, or bard, is homage paid;  
The bay-tree's laurel's, myrtle shades,  
Men's thoughts resign;  
Heaven placed us here to vote and trade,  
Twin tasks divine!

"Tis youth, 'tis beauty asks; the green  
And growing leaves of seventeen  
Are round her; and half hid, half seen,  
A violet flower,  
Nursed by the virtues she hath been  
From childhood's hour.

"Blind passion's picture -- yet for this  
We woo the life-long bridal kiss,  
And blend our every hope of bliss  
With hers we love;  
Unmindful of the serpent's hiss  
In Eden's grove.

"Beauty -- the fading rainbows pride,  
Youth -- 'twas the charm of her who died  
At dawn, and by her coffin's side  
A grandsire stands,  
Age-strengthened, like the oak storm-tried  
Of mountain lands.

"Youth's coffin -- hush the tale it tells;  
Be silent, memory's funeral bells!  
Lone in one heart, her home, it dwells  
Untold till death,  
And where the grave-mound greenly swells  
O'er buried faith.

"But what if hers are rank and power,  
Armies her train, a throne her bower,  
A kingdom's gold her marriage dower,  
Broad seas and lands?  
What if from bannered hall and tower  
A queen commands?

"A queen? Earth's regal moons have set.  
Where perished Marie Antoinette?  
Where's Bordeaux's mother? Where the jet-  
Black Haytian dame?  
And Lusitania's coronet?  
And Angouleme[?]

"Empires to-day are upside down,  
The castle kneels before the town,  
The monarch fears a printer's frown,  
A brickbat's range;  
Give me in preference to a crown,  
Five shillings change.

"But she who asks, though first among  
The good, the beautiful, the young,  
The birthright of a spell more strong  
Than these hath brought her;  
She is your kinswoman in song --  
A Poet's daughter.

"A Poet's daughter? Could I claim  
The consanguinity of fame,  
Veins of my intellect frame!  
Your blood would grow  
Proudly to sing that gentlest name  
Of aught below.

"A Poet's daughter -- dearer word  
Lip hath not spoke or listener heard,  
Fit theme for song of bee and bird  
From morn till even,  
And wind-harp by the breathing stirred  
Of star-lit heaven.

"My spirit's wings are weak, the fire  
Poetic comes but to expire;  
Her name needs not my humble lyre  
To bid it live;  
She hath already from her sire  
All bard can give."

[Note. The last two lines, "She hath...," are in italics.]

[End of footnote.]

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attributed to Wordsworth; and such as became exceedingly popular in England; from the newspapers of which country they were re-copied in the United States, as the productions of the great lake-poet. Many of his most distinguished fellow laborers in the literary vineyard were liberal in their commendations of his effusions, and he himself was one of the most conciliatory of critics, and ever ready to discern, welcome, and encourage true merit wherever he found it.

In an outline sketch like this, we can allude to only a few of his many gracious qualities of head and heart. He was a genuine poet of Nature's own creation. He wrote because he could not help but yield to the impulse of his genius; and all his productions breath a pure, healthy, and benevolent spirit, and are invariably sound in sentimental and musical expression.

The three previous editions of the poetical works of Samuel Woodworth being entirely out of print, this first complete edition will, no doubt, not only prove the truth of our estimate of his genius, but be a valuable contribution to American literature.

Woodworth's life was imbued with the same kind, gentle, amiable spirit which marked his writings. In all the relations of husband, father, friend, and citizen, he was most exemplary; and those who knew him best, most appreciated his worth. He was deservedly and universally beloved. Many of his productions have the elements of perpetuity within them. His "Old Oaken Bucket"\*\* will be sung, read, and admired, as long as cool water from the well continues to slake the thirst of the weary traveler.

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[Footnote.]

\* The following reminiscence possesses sufficient interest, we think, to warrant us in presenting it here. It is a condensed private letter received from one whose authority in the matter cannot be questioned. In reference to the period of the production of "The Old Oaken Bucket," the writer says: "It was written in the Spring or Summer of 1817. The family were living at the time in Duane street. The poet came home to dinner very warm day having walked from his office, somewhere near the foot of Wall Street. Being much heated with the exercise, he drank a glass of water -- New York pump water -- exclaiming as he replaced the tumbler on the table, 'That is very refreshing; but how much more refreshing would it be to take a good long draught, this warm day, from the old oaken bucket I left hanging in my father's well at home!' Hearing this, the poet's wife, who was always a suggestive body, said, 'Selim, why wouldn't that be a pretty subject for a poem?' The poet took the hint, and, under the inspiration of the moment, sat down and poured out from the very depths of his heart those beautiful lines which have immortalized the name of Woodworth."

[End of footnote.]

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Of this charming pastoral song, William Leggett, one of the most careful and discriminating critics of our time has thus spoken. "Its merit consists in the graphic accuracy of the description, the simplicity and nature of its sentiments, and the melodious

flow of the versification. It appeals to feelings cherished in every human bosom, which, though they may be suppressed for a while, can never be extinguished; but are called up anew by such strains, as the one we are speaking of, with a train of sweet associations, that 'lap us in Elysium.' amidst the thousand vexations and perplexities of business, the mere perusal or accidental hearing of this song, gathers around us the scenes and companions of our school-boy days, creating in our hearts a tide of emotions, fresh and pure as the fountain that gushes from the rock of the desert. We hear the splash of the water as it falls down the sides of the moss-lined well; we view the dimpling and rippling undulations of the surface below, as it is sprinkled by the dripping upon it; we see on one side the meadow, green with the fragrant luxuriance of summer, and on the other, the bridge and the cataract, and the dairy house; the coolness of the water is on the lip, familiar noises are sounding in our ear, and, in short, this delightful little poem forms around us, with the delusive power of a dream, a chain of heart-hoarded circumstances which can never be united again, except by the witchery of the poet, or the wand of fancy, in those still hours when she exerts full influence over our minds."

But it is not necessary to discuss the literary merits of Samuel Woodworth. We can safely leave his fame as a poet to time and his country.

Six years previous to his death, he had an attack of paralysis, the effects of which he bore with his characteristic fortitude and meekness. He breathed his last on the ninth of December, 1842, in the fifty-eight year of his age.

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For the text itself (and otherwise) of both 1861 volumes of Woodworth's verse, see the University of Virginia Library at:

[http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_ap/uvaGenText/tei/chap\\_AM1249.xml;brand=default;](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_ap/uvaGenText/tei/chap_AM1249.xml;brand=default;)

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